

RACHAEL SHERLOCK

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CORK STUDENT

RUNNING FOR VICE -PRESIDENT FOR WELFARE



Me

Hi, my name is Rachael Sherlock. Originally from Belfast, I moved to Cork 4 years ago to study Energy Engineering at UCC. I have been an active member of societies throughout my four years here, including committee roles on St. Vincent de Paul, the Engineering Society and Engineers Without Borders as well as volunteering with many charitable events such as Relay for Life, Darkness into Light and Paddle against Suicide; and now in my final year I would like to be your next VP for Welfare on USI. As a current student I believe I can bring light to the real issues faced by students every day and tackle them with profound efficiency and dedication. Coming from an engineering background, I am trained to think freely and 'outside of the box' to achieve sustainable solutions. However, my aim were I to be elected is not just to provide solutions but to prevent the need for a solution at all. Below are some of my main focuses as a candidate and how I hope to implement change as your next Vice-President for Welfare.

Accommodation

In addition to addressing the accommodation crisis my policies will include a massive focus on the substandard living conditions students are currently forced to live in. I plan to put together comprehensive documents outlining students' rights as tenants and aiding students in obtaining legal advice when seeking accommodation including constructing a contract that students can provide to landlords to guarantee basic living rights. These contracts would outline the basic standard all landlords are obliged to uphold under law so that tenants have, in writing, an actionable remedy against landlords who breach their duties.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

It's no revelation that Health services in University's across the board are underfunded; and as a result, provide a less than acceptable service. Students are waiting up to 6 weeks for a counselling and a minimum of 2 months for a psychiatrist in certain universities. I will not only continue to lobby for more funding to increase staff, but I will also work with Welfare Officers in approaching their local health centres to assist universities by taking in a few students a week to reduce pressure on the services currently available until a more sustainable solution can be achieved.

A key component to taking care of our mental health is communication. It's necessary for us to speak to our peers regarding our mental struggles; however, it's also necessary that our peers know how to respond. I plan to increase (and implement where appropriate) the level of trainings such as SafeTalk and QPR that are provided to students. I will also begin a movement to mandate course heads to take these trainings to better equip them should a student confide in them beyond an academic level and better help them understand the effects of mental illness on academics. I believe these trainings will improve the overall wellbeing of the students across Ireland and help further the work towards breaking down the stigma.

Self-care is often an aspect of our lives that we unfortunately overlook and an incredibly important one. Knowing how to take care of all aspects of our health is not only essential but has many components to it, ranging from physical exercise to taking that step forward and going to counselling. This is especially important for incoming first years and international students as well as our own Erasmus and placement students who're all about to experience a completely new environment. Introducing self-care workshops at orientations and before students begin their journeys abroad will equip the relevant students with the means to take better care of themselves outside of their comfort zones and inform them of the services that are available to them.

Looking after your mind also requires you to look after your body. I have previously worked with the UCC Health Society to assist students in their eating habits by producing a cookbook containing quick, easy, and delicious food recipes for students. I plan to expand on this to produce a more polished version to include in welcome packs for incoming students. In addition to this I hope to follow in the footsteps of UCC and implement a program known as the *UCC Mardyke Fitness and Wellbeing Program* which provides a selection of students with fitbits, regular appointments with a health advisor and assistance using fitness equipment should they require it. I plan to advance this program on a national level by working with colleges and their associated or nearby fitness gyms to provide a similar experience across all universities.

Assisting Officers

Officer roles on any SU and on the USI are filled with the most caring and passionate people who often forget to take care of themselves in their aim to provide the best for the students they represent. However, a healthier representative is a more successful one and it's what the student movement deserves. I plan to start an initiative to keep our Officers healthy which will include self-care workshops and fitness classes such as Zumba and Yoga at each council and a specific class at the beginning of term on diet and nutrition. I plan to initiate the Fitness and Wellbeing Program through SU and USI Officers which will help make officers more aware of their own health and the need to balance their lives.

S.H.A.G. and Consent

The movement for consent workshops has already been successful in certain Universities. I will continue work on the national model by regularly obtaining feedback from Universities and updating the model based on the overall analysis and new information sourced from other bodies.

It is important that we take care of our sexual health but more importantly that we know how to do so. I will lobby for free STI checks in every University Health Centre. As well as provide all the relevant information. In addition to this I will provide

information to Universities regarding the need for smear testing and prostate exams once we reach the age of University level and will lobby for funding to provide these tests to students within their University Health Centres.

Tampons are a huge issue for the female reproductive system as they impact negatively on their sexual health. I plan to increase awareness on this issue and the potential to use menstrual cups which I have already secured a 15% discount on for Students as well as information packs and a help line should a student be concerned regarding its use.

Safe Drugs

We need to approach drug use amongst students from a sensible prospective. Drug abuse is one of the biggest problems amongst students in recent times and regardless of what we say, students will continue to partake in the consumption of drugs. If elected I would like to educate students on the short and long-term effects of the substances they're consuming.

To make this as effective as possible, I'd like to incorporate training into orientation in coordination with organisations such as ChillWelfare and Helpnotharm; so that incoming first years are aware of the dangers involved in taking drugs and how to assist someone who has taken a bad reaction to drugs. I will also lobby for funding to provide safe drug testing kits to all students including training workshops on how the kits are used safely. As a follow up, I ensure that students continue to be well informed by releasing new statistics regarding progress in the movement to encourage safer usage.

I will also campaign to hold a referendum stating that the USI will support the decriminalisation of drugs.

Standardising Welfare Crews and Overall Housekeeping

Case work is a key responsibility as an SU Welfare Officer; however, given that other duties are involved in the role, the Welfare Officer is not always available in the office for walk in appointments. I would like to introduce a 'Green Light System' across the board that has already proven successful in other Universities. It will show when the Welfare Officer is present in the office and inform students of when they will be back. Officers will only see approximately 3% of the students registered with their university, this will ensure a more approachable system and hopefully bring forward more students who require assistance.

Welfare Crews have become an asset to Welfare Officers in many Universities, however many are still struggling to find their feet while other universities have yet to establish one. I would like to improve the quality of Welfare crews by standardising the core necessities across Universities by providing its members with the appropriate training to step in should the Welfare Officer be unavailable. This would involve a national Welfare Crew Council where we can assist them in their duties by

providing the appropriate trainings and workshops to better prepare the crew for assisting their Welfare Officer. This would also improve the concept of the Green Light System as it can be progressed to include 'yellow light' signifying that you have the option to speak to an experienced volunteer or arrange to see the Welfare Officer at another time.

LGBTQ+

I will encourage Universities to incorporate a 'Coming Out in Ireland' seminar for orientation. The aim of the discussion will be that international students will gain insight into the diverse and accepting community of our Universities towards the LGBTQ+ community.

I will campaign to ease the process for students who wish to change their names and photos on college documents in their University.

I will campaign for the LGBTQ+ Rights Officers in Universities to have dedicated times where students who need, can have time to speak with them directly, and in confidence. The LGBTQ+ Rights Officer will be trained in active listening, through infrastructure of peer support.

Disability Issues

I will lobby for funding to provide an interpreter at USI events and encourage Universities to follow suit for their larger events such as council and hustings to aid the audibly impaired.

I also plan to campaign for a designated quiet area or sensory area at USI events for students who struggle with difficulties such as ADHD and Asperger's syndrome but wish to attend the events.

Thank you for taking the time to read my manifesto, I look forward to speaking with you all in the coming weeks with regard to my manifesto and what I can do for you. For now, if you have any questions, I can be contacted at the address below.

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Rachael Sherlock